



2024 Ministerial Meeting
on the Baltic Sea
Marine Environment



Riga, Latvia • 25 April 2024

Ministerial Declaration

of the 2024 Ministerial Meeting
on the Baltic Sea Environment

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

We, the Ministers of Climate, of the Environment, of Infrastructure and of Maritime Affairs of the Baltic Sea coastal states that are also Member States of the European Union and the Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries of the European Commission, assembled in Riga, Latvia, on 25 April 2024, on the occasion of the 2024 Ministerial Meeting on the Baltic Sea Marine Environment:

- **NOTING** with appreciation the 50th anniversary of the signing of the 1974 Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, the work conducted over the course of five decades under the auspices of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) and the pioneering role that HELCOM has fulfilled at the regional level;
- **RECALLING** the aims and provisions of the 1992 Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, in force since 17 January 2000;
- **RECALLING** also the HELCOM vision of “a healthy Baltic Sea environment, with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in good environmental status and supporting a wide range of sustainable human economic and social activities”;
- **NOTING** the progress achieved in implementing the Baltic Sea Action Plan adopted in 2007;
- **RECALLING** and **REAFFIRMING** the goals of the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (2021 BSAP) adopted by the 2021 Ministerial Meeting, held in Lübeck, Germany and **REITERATING** the conclusion of that Meeting that the current state of the Baltic Sea marine environment remains unsatisfactory as a result of pressures from both land- and sea-based human activities and that recovery is not yet sufficient to achieve the goals of the 2021 BSAP;
- **RECALLING** also the Declaration and Commitments adopted by the Ministers of the Environment, Maritime Economy, Agriculture and Fisheries of EU Baltic Sea Member States and of the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries at the “Our Baltic” Ministerial Meetings in 2020 and in 2023, with a view to achieving a clean and healthy Baltic Sea;
- **ACKNOWLEDGING** that the work of HELCOM has yielded significant environmental improvements and contributed to preventing further deterioration of the environment of the Baltic Sea, including preventing pollution and other harmful impacts from shipping and other maritime activities, while ensuring safe navigation in the Baltic Sea;
- **HIGHLIGHTING** the finalization of the Third Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS 3), covering the period from 2016 to 2021, and **ACKNOWLEDGING** its importance in taking stock of the current level of implementation of the 2021 BSAP and establishing benchmarks for the future implementation of the Plan;
- **NOTING** with deep concern, however, that the Baltic Sea continues to be heavily affected by multiple anthropogenic pressures, as reflected in the outcome of HOLAS 3;
- **NOTING** the potential economic benefits of countering the various threats to the Baltic Sea ecosystem, as reflected by HOLAS 3, according to which achieving good environmental status in the Baltic Sea Region by 2040 is projected to provide an annual economic benefit of 5.6 billion euros to the region’s population, and **ACKNOWLEDGING** the potential cost of inaction as evidenced by the estimated loss of 9 billion euros annually in recreational benefits alone due to environmental degradation;
- **NOTING** that the Baltic Sea is under increasing impact from the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, in particular due to (a) the use of marine and terrestrial space and resource extraction (b) the fact that eutrophication continues to have a particularly severe impact on the Baltic Sea; (c) the fact that levels of hazardous substances as well as submerged munitions and wrecks, the introduction of non-indigenous species into the Baltic Sea and marine litter remain issues of major concern; (d) the fact that seabed disturbance due to human activity remains high and other pressures such as underwater noise negatively affect marine life;
- **REITERATING** that the achievement of good environmental status for the Baltic Sea will require enhanced efforts and transformational change across all relevant sectors of the economy, including agriculture and forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, tourism, logistics, shipping and manufacturing, as well as the public sector, and necessitates among other things greater efficiency in the use of resources and a transition to a clean and sustainable circular economy;
- **ACKNOWLEDGING** the important role of science and research in supporting informed decision-making, as well as for progressing transformative change towards securing good environmental status of the Baltic Sea;
- **RECOGNIZING** the linkages between good environmental status for the Baltic Sea and the prosperity for the people around the Baltic Sea, as well as the economic activities that depend on the ecosystem services;
 - **MINDFUL** of the links between the state of the world’s oceans and seas and climate change and the resultant need for measures aimed at improving the former to also contribute to mitigating the latter;
 - **NOTING** the importance of the ecosystem approach, the precautionary principle and adaptive management in working to meet the objectives of the 2021 BSAP;
 - **NOTING** the role of the Baltic Sea Region as a global front-runner in regionally coherent maritime spatial planning and **STRESSING** the need for coherent, adaptive and sustainable spatial planning of human activities at sea across the region in order to minimize the pressures arising from human activities and to avoid conflicts between various uses of the Baltic Sea, and therefore the need to continue the successful cooperation with VASAB in coordinating regional maritime spatial planning;
 - **RECOGNIZING** the linkages between environmental protection and safety and security in the Baltic Sea Region, notably against the background of a changing geopolitical landscape;
 - **ACKNOWLEDGING** the important role of intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in preserving and protecting the Baltic Sea and the continued need for strong regional and cross-sectoral cooperation in working towards achieving good environmental status of the Baltic Sea;
 - **REITERATING** the need to coordinate and harmonize the work of HELCOM overall, and the implementation of the 2021 BSAP in particular, with relevant initiatives at the global, European, regional and national levels, including in particular the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the IMO Strategy on Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Ships, the work of relevant United Nations Conventions, the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the EU Water Framework Directive, the

EU Maritime Security Strategy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directives, the European Green Deal, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems and resilient fisheries and the Baltic and North Sea Basin Lighthouse under the Mission Ocean, Seas and Water and all other relevant EU legislation and programmes and policies;

- **WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO**, and seeking synergies with, the legislation of the European Union, international agreements and national legislation;

hereby declare that we:

- 1. REAFFIRM** our strong commitment to continued cooperation within the framework of HELCOM;
- 2. UNDERScore** our intention to continue to develop HELCOM as an effective and well-functioning regional cooperation organization capable of action even in unforeseen and force majeure situations;
- 3. RECOMMIT** to fully implementing the 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan and achieving the goals laid down in that plan by the dates specified in the Plan, with a view to finalizing implementation of the BSAP as a whole by 2030 at the latest and to achieving good environmental status for our sea;
- 4. RECOMMIT** to fully implementing, by 2027 at the latest, all nutrient input reduction measures necessary to achieve the net input ceilings (NICs);
- 5. AGREE** that the ecological and management objectives in the various segments of the 2021 BSAP, which are based on best available knowledge at the time of its elaboration, should be periodically reviewed and revised using a harmonized approach and the most up-to-date information, in line with the principles of adaptive management;
- 6. REITERATE** the commitment by HELCOM to implementing a source-to-sea approach with the aim of preventing pollution from entering the Baltic Sea from the catchment area;
- 7. AGREE** to establish and adopt shared goals, objectives and quantitative targets for spatial protection, and, by 2028, incorporate these into an overarching framework for protection in the Baltic Sea, the aim of which is to secure improved effectiveness of protection and pressure reduction, supporting the implementation of the relevant BSAP Actions, as well as the implementation of related international commitments such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;
- 8. REAFFIRM** our commitment to stringent conservation measures in the Baltic Sea and the achievement, by 2030, of a coherent, well connected and effectively managed network of HELCOM marine protected areas, which will cover at least 30 percent of the sea area, of which at least 10 percent will be strictly protected;
- 9. UNDERLINE** the role of HELCOM in leading regional efforts to this effect and as an important and recognized contributor in the context of international ocean governance;
- 10. AGREE** that the effectiveness of action taken in the framework of HELCOM shall continue to be evaluated by using appropriate monitoring and indicators to measure the progress towards the targets, allowing for the adjustments needed to ensure that the objectives are achieved;
- 11. REITERATE** the continued need for Holistic Assessments of the Baltic Sea, not least as a means of tracking progress in implementing the 2021 BSAP, and **REAFFIRM** the mandate of HELCOM to proceed with the 4th Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS 4), starting this process in 2024 and further developing the scope and content of the assessment, with a view to finalization of the assessment by 2029 and strengthening the exercise inter alia by increasing the number of operational indicators and improving the tools used for its implementation;
- 12. ADOPT** the updated HELCOM Science Agenda;
- 13. AGREE** to continued cooperation between HELCOM and other Regional Seas Conventions, as well as River Basin Management Commissions;
- 14. REAFFIRM** our intention to continue to involve other relevant regional and national organizations, financing institutions, scientific and research institutions, civil society and the private sector in working towards realizing the objectives of our organization, noting the need to achieve maximum efficiency in advancing the HELCOM agenda by better integrating the private sector into the implementation of the BSAP.

